



## Truth and Reconciliation Commission

### DRAFT Minutes – Public Meeting #3

November 7, 2023

Meeting opened at 4:55 by Faith Yacubian

Start Time: 5:00pm

Mackin, Melody, Commissioner is presiding over this meeting. Introductions and descriptions.

**Attendance:** Melody Mackin, Mia Schultz, Faith Yacubian, Michele Olvera, Adam Kersch and Ann Miller with Nicole as the ASL Interpreter.

**Members of the Public included:** Erin Ruble, Eli Clare, John Hunt, Tara O'Brien, Rhonda Besaw, Rachel Lewis, John Walters, David Savoie – Radio Canada, Maria Reba Pratt, Michelle Gawerc, Jules, Charlene Galameau, Lexi Krupp, Vermont Public, Richard Witting and Wayne Maceyka.

---

Language accessibility explained. We have the interpreter here tonight and in terms of other language pieces, please let us know if there is anyone that needs other language services. If you speak another language and you would like us to get an interpreter, then let us know by email. Email address placed in chat.

If there are any members of the press here, if you need VTRC to send advanced notices of the meeting beyond what is always posted on our website and the State of Vermont Library meeting site, please let us know.

Faith Yacubian explained the Teams function of text to speech and live captions.

Land Acknowledgement read by Melody Mackin. Also, it is on our website if anyone would like to review further.

Commissioner Mackin told a story of her walk in the woods. There was a nice place in an area that came to a diverged path. Commissioner Mackin had a moment where *“I was there and recalled a children's book who came down that road and I think about that often, it's not just about who came down that road, but who is going to come down that road in the future and what we want that to look like, what kind of community we want here and how do we create that?”*

**Regarding attendance:** We are going to change it up a little bit because we did get some feedback and we want everybody to know that if you give us feedback, we are listening.

For those that want to participate in this meeting, please place your name and pronouns, organization if with one, in the chat. If someone speaks, you have to put your name in the chat and announce yourself. This is for the public meeting law and transparency purposes so that we have an accurate review of our meeting minutes and what transpired at a meeting. We don't want to exclude people, and we do have to comply with public meeting laws. If you choose only to listen and not speak, you do not have to put anything in chat for now.

**Meeting Agreement Review:** Commissioner Mackin shared her screen. These agreements are on our website, and you are welcome to follow along. Full agreement not read, reviewed only.

Meeting Minutes from October 3, 2023 reviewed and approved unanimously by Commissioner Schultz and Commissioner Mackin.

**TRC Team Update:** What staff is doing.

**Michele Olvera**, she/her pronouns, descriptions: General Legal Counsel. Have been talking to a group that advocates and leaders and different communities and finding out what those communities have been experiencing. Similar to that, I've been reading a lot of different cases of discrimination that have happened in recent history, long ago history, and learning about those cases. Have been recording some of those and also learning about the laws that are in and around those cases. Beginning to understand those kinds of laws and thinking about how they impact people.

**Adam Kersch**, he/him/they pronouns, description, Lead Researcher: Michelle and I work closely together. While Michelle is looking through these different instances of discrimination and oppression, this is something that a lot of times we're doing as a team with Michelle looking at like the legal aspects and me looking at the more historical aspects. While she's been doing legal research into the legal background for different situations that we've been looking at, I have also been reading up on the history of Vermont and other sort of like relevant social and historical topics that have come up as we're looking through things. We have been reaching out to different organizations in the community to get to know what exactly is expected of us and what we can do for the state. It has been wonderful getting to have some really profound conversations with people.

**Ann Miller** she/her, Administrative Assistant: Working with the team just trying to build website as well as figuring out how we are storing all our paperwork and all the information that's coming in. Trying to get it such that we could find it when we need it. Have also been working on the newsletter, which hopefully you'll be seeing shortly, as well as meeting minutes etc.

**Faith Yacubian**, she/her/they/them pronouns, descriptors: Executive Director for the Vermont Truth and Reconciliation, working with many beautiful people – intelligent and

wise, and in that pool is also community partners. Some of those community partners we are working with are connected with other team members. We have built community connections with orgs, such as Outright Vermont and folks at Champlain College. I'm following connections others staff members and Commissioners have made with community partners. And, I've been creating a list of community-partners in order to send requests and letters. In addition, preparing for an upcoming retreat. Many of the things I do, I don't do alone, so when I add other people, it's intentional.

**Melody Mackin**, Commissioner: we have been doing a lot of outreach, as has the team. Commissioner Mackin has been visiting places and trying to look at archives such as Vermont History Day and opportunities that there may be for partnering. We have been working on writing the strategic plan and to get all of our retreats done as team building. We have been very busy and we are anxious for the time we will be able to share this with the public and our partners. Right now, we're still in the building and planning phase and the hope is to bring this rollout the first of the new year. Love reading through comments and messages with input and feedback regarding our Mission and the VTRC in general. Some folks have also sent learning resources that we can use.

**Mia Schultz**, Commissioner, she/her pronouns and descriptors: It sounds like we are minimizing the work that we're doing, but we are working hard. It is difficult to sum it all up in words, but we have to create this plan from nothing. As we discussed at the last public meeting, we're building the House right now and are excited to show you all the framework when we can.

Mission and Vision: We had great feedback regarding the draft which is on our website (read the Draft Mission Statement) and then discussion ensued on edits to that Mission.

Our draft statement for our mission is: *The Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission exists in a pursuit of community-centered justice and holistic healing centered on impacted intergenerational Act 128 communities.*

*We seek collective liberation from institutional, systemic, violence and racism by uplifting community voices through storytelling, researching and community relationships.*

We have appreciated the feedback we have received on that draft mission statement and taken it into account: example from the public (remain unnamed): "I wonder about specifying ableism xenophobia and settler colonialism alongside of racism, since it is the four systems of oppression often intertwined together that target the communities named and Act 128."

Commissioner Mackin: Rather, the centering of ableism which is crucial to understanding the past and present harms done to disabled people.

The centering crucial to French Canadians, settler colonialism- crucial to indigenous peoples and racism crucial to black people and other people of color, these four systems have long worked together to cast the communities named in Act 128 as defective, disposable and dangerous. They are also interlocked with other kinds of oppression, and

for the purposes of the VTRC's work, I think there could be a lot of clarity and power in naming colonialism, racism, ableism, and xenophobia side by side.

2<sup>nd</sup> example public email: "saw on Facebook page and struggled with the two uses of centered within a few words of each other. No reference for exactly what Act 128 is and wanting to specifically name it."

Commissioner Schultz: It is too narrow and that maybe we needed to just say discrimination.

Commissioner Mackin: We need to change the words. The part that they're talking about "*seeking collective liberation from institutional systemic violence and racism.*" Change and maybe use a word that can encompass all. Discrimination?

We see collective liberation from institutional systemic violence and racism, (pull together, as there are too many to name).

Commissioner Schultz: The comment suggests that we have a group of communities that ACT 128 specifically labels; our mandate leads to those specific groups and the isms and bias's that those specific groups have had to endure under state of Vermont policy.

Commissioner Mackin: We could put that in the first section, but the Mission Statement won't fit on a coffee mug, unless it is a big mug.

Commissioner Schultz: We could go back just a little bit before we get to racism. One input item that we can resolve quickly is the ACT 128 communities/ list as per the mandate. When someone that hasn't read the mandate would not know our mission.

Mandate reviewed: Native American or indigenous individuals with physical psychiatric or mental conditions or disability, and the families of individuals with physical psychiatric or mental health condition or disability. Black individuals and other individuals of color, individuals with French Canadian with French Canadian, French, Indian or other mixed ethnic or racial heritage and other populations and communities at the discretion of the Commissioners. Should we add that particular descriptor in place of ACT 128 communities?

Commissioner Mackin: We need to shorten first, and put that in the first paragraph, taking out "the Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission" and just put "we".

"We exist in a pursuit of Community Center justice;"

Commissioner Schultz: For the second paragraph that leads us to the piece referenced in the initial comment about labeling the isn't the additional umm isms if you will and because I'm looking at the list and how comprehensive it is, I do feel like we could potentially lose some descriptors in terms of the ISMS and the bias'. Those are the ones mentioned in the comment and impact those groups and are part of the history and present. Add in: "seek collective liberation from institutional systemic violence and discrimination." We didn't, give *The Who* in there- who would be the State of Vermont. That's part of the mandate and it should be part of the mission. It could be that we seek

collective liberation from violence and cultural district, discrimination. systemically perpetrated by the State of Vermont.

The word “racism” removed and replacing it with discrimination that mean that means that we are not losing harm done to other communities that we don't might not be in our ACT 128, like in the mandate.

Commissioner Mackin: We seek collective liberation from violence and discrimination systemically perpetrated by the state of Vermont. By uplifting community voices through storytelling, researching, and community relationships.

Commissioner Schultz read the paragraph completely:

**We exist in a pursuit of community-centered, justice and holistic healing centered on impacted ACT 128, include communities: which includes Native American or Indigenous; individuals with physical, psychiatric, or mental conditions or disability, and the families of individuals with the physical, psychiatric or mental health condition or disability; black individuals and other individuals of color, individuals of with French Canadian, French- Indian or other mixed ethnic or racial heritage; and other populations and communities at the discretion of the Commissioners.**

**We seek collective liberation from violence and discrimination systemically perpetrated by the State of Vermont by uplifting community voices through storytelling, researching and community relationships, and recommendations for implementation.**

Commissioner Mackin: We can vote on this new Mission Statement today. If it comes up later that we want to reconsider, we can revisit.

Commissioner Mackin and Commissioner Schultz voted unanimously to accept the Mission Statement as edited.

Faith Yacubian read the letter from Patrick Standin regarding his departure from the Commission effective November 3, 2023. His decision is prompted by his desire to return to teaching college full time. We respect his decision; we will greatly miss him, and we will continue to learn from his experiences and his contributions.

Ann Miller reviewed the logo contest and shared the announcement on screen.

We are going to share this out to students of all ages and ask that the community also share it out to any student or class they think might be interested. The announcement will be on the website this week.

Commissioner Mackin: Are there any special meeting announcements for emblematic cases which we would totally love people to participate in. Michele and Adam will be leading the meetings.

Michele Olvera: Adam and I talked about, we've been looking at a lot of cases, the whole Commission really has been looking at many cases, but we're gathering sort of our first group of cases representing a broad range of discrimination in Vermont.

These are emblematic cases. We are having public meetings on November 29th, December 1st, and if we need it, December 7<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of those meetings is to look at those cases together and come up with some themes that we're going to draw from those cases, and then we're going to use those themes to sort of move forward. To further investigations to find opportunities of restorative and reconciliation practices for change and the systems and statutes of Vermont.

We are still collecting these cases until November 26<sup>th</sup>.

Commissioner Mackin spoke about the lack of one Commissioner. A new add would have to be mandated by the legislature as it is not currently in the statute.

### **Public speaking:**

If folks want to share you have something to say, then each person is welcome to take two minutes to speak.

Regarding Former Commissioner Patrick's resignation and next steps, we are waiting until the legislature decides on how to move forward for the replacement.

Maria Reba Pratt, she/her, descriptors added: spoke of her own experience after living in for 13 years. Interested in emblematic cases and explained her own circumstance and situation. An indigenous woman who experiencing poverty and major mental illness was discouraged from parenting - told by a state official, you're not raising your kid on our public welfare program. Was trying to work and support myself. Was disavowed. Told by a state official I was approached because my partner was practicing polygamy.

I certainly hope that I can give an interview and speak to this matter as one woman who survived it.

Jules, she/her pronouns, descriptors: Have been following the work of the TRC and also news about the Abenaki. Vermont Public news recently. Brave Little State - Relevant to the work of the VTRC and redressing historical harms to indigenous people and also people who are harmed by the eugenics survey. If anyone is listening and didn't hear the recent coverage it suggested and claimed made claims with evidence that the state recognized bands of Abenaki do not, in fact, have Abenaki ancestry and are in fact European Americans or descended of Europeans who are now Americans who are claiming to be indigenous without evidence, or in some cases, if there may be contradicting evidence. If this were true, that that would have a significant impact on the work of the TRC, because it would be a violation of indigenous sovereignty that's perpetrated by the state of Vermont in its recognition process. Report questioned the many people who were harmed by the eugenics survey, if any were Abenaki or indigenous at all. It is stated mission to find the truth and make reparations for the harms that have caused by the state, I would like to suggest that one of the cases that the TRC investigate would be this claim. I don't mean to say this in a name calling way or I just I think it makes sense that I'd like to put forward that if the TRC were to take this on and to do it effectively, Commissioner Mackin may need to recuse herself from this particular

case just because she is a member of one of the state recognized tribes whose legitimacy has been called into question.

Meeting concluded 5:59pm